THE CONCEPT OF EQUIVALENCE IN TRANSLATION THEORY: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

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Abstract: *This article explores the multifaceted concept of equivalence in translation theory, a foundational idea that guides translators in ensuring that source and target texts convey comparable meaning and impact. The discussion covers key theorists such as Jakobson, Nida, Catford, and Vinay & Darbelnet, highlighting their views on different types of equivalence. The article also investigates the practical challenges translators face when dealing with cultural references, idioms, and technical terminology. Through theory and examples, this paper demonstrates how equivalence remains both a central and contested idea in modern translation studies.*

Keywords:*Translation Theory, Equivalence, Nida, Jakobson, Catford, Dynamic Equivalence, Cultural Translation, Translation Challenges*

Introduction

Equivalence is one of the most debated and foundational concepts in translation studies. It addresses the relationship between a source text (ST) and its target text (TT), aiming for semantic and functional alignment. Although the notion of achieving complete equivalence has been challenged, it continues to inform both theoretical inquiry and translation practice.

Theoretical Foundations

Roman Jakobson (1959) introduced the idea of "equivalence in difference," stating that no two languages share full equivalence. He categorized translation into intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic types. Eugene Nida (1964) proposed two major forms of equivalence: formal and dynamic. Formal equivalence prioritizes

structure and form, while dynamic equivalence focuses on natural expression and the impact on the target audience.

J.C. Catford (1965) contributed the ideas of textual equivalence and formal correspondence, offering a linguistic approach to translation. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) regarded equivalence as one of seven strategies used in translation, particularly applicable to idiomatic expressions and cultural references.

Types of Equivalence

Equivalence can be classified into several types:

• Formal equivalence: word-for-word translation

• Dynamic equivalence: sense-for-sense translation

• Textual equivalence: equivalence at the level of meaning in the whole text (Catford)

• Functional/pragmatic equivalence: matching the function or purpose of the text

Peter Newmark refined these concepts by distinguishing between semantic (closer to the source text) and communicative (closer to the target audience) translation.

Practical Challenges

Achieving equivalence is often complicated by cultural, linguistic, and contextual differences. Some expressions, idioms, and references have no direct equivalents in the target language. For instance:

• Idioms like "kick the bucket" cannot be translated literally.

• Humor and wordplay often require creative adaptation.

• Legal and technical translations demand precise terminology and cultural adaptation.

These issues make equivalence a balancing act between accuracy, readability, and cultural appropriateness.

Examples and Applications

Consider the English idiom "kick the bucket" — a literal translation would not make sense in most languages. Instead, a translator must choose an equivalent

idiom or a descriptive explanation. In legal translation, terms like "common law" may have no direct counterpart in civil law countries, requiring a functional adaptation.

These examples show that equivalence involves more than linguistic matching; it requires cultural knowledge, context analysis, and critical thinking.

Conclusion

Equivalence remains central to translation theory despite criticisms and limitations. It offers a practical framework for analyzing and comparing texts, and for making informed translation decisions. Translators must apply the concept flexibly and creatively to ensure meaning is preserved and effectively communicated across languages and cultures.

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